Employer Brand 101
How to Win at Recruitment and Retention through Marketing and Communications
An Imaginasium E-Book – Part 1
Chapter 1: What Is an Employer Brand (and Why Does It Matter)?

The workforce perfect storm is here.


If you are responsible in any way for your company’s growth, you know full well the impact of this perfect storm. And there’s a good chance it’s keeping you up at night. You see, gone are the days where you can post an open position, wait for a week or two, sift through a pile of applications, interview four or five candidates, and hire the very best person for the job. It’s an employee’s-choice world out there.

Unlike post-recession America, employees hold all the power. Prospects are shopping for jobs the same way they’re shopping for a new smartphone—researching, comparing, and basing decisions on how they feel about the company offering the product. And current employees are evaluating their jobs not only on pay and benefits, but on how well the company aligns with their own beliefs or how proud they are to speak about where they work.
With that kind of shift in the recruitment and retention landscape, what’s an employer to do?

Just like a brand selling smartphones to consumers, prospects and employees learn about you from what your organization does and how it acts. They get to know you by what you say and the experience they have when interacting with you. And that means communication is arguably the most important factor in employee recruitment and retention success. The companies that will thrive are the ones who are willing to step out of the traditional paradigm of how they hire and start thinking about how they communicate “what’s in it for you if you choose to work with us” to employees and prospects.

You can call that your employer brand—the perception of who you are as a company and how it will feel to work for you. You can call it your unique value proposition, or what you have to offer as an employer that no one else can match. Uncovering your unique value proposition for current employees and prospective recruits, then communicating that value, is key to positioning yourself as an employer of choice. That’s what we’ve created this e-book to help you do.

But first, let’s take a closer look at what’s going on.

Wisconsin’s Workforce Outlook

By 2024, Wisconsin will have an estimated 45,000 open jobs with no one to fill them*

88% of manufacturers are having trouble filling open positions in 2018, compared to 29% in 2011**

*Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development
**Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance
The competition for talent is on.
Manufacturing is alive and well in Northeast Wisconsin and beyond. A 2018 study conducted by the Northeast Wisconsin Manufacturing Alliance (NEWMA) revealed that 99 percent of respondents expect their companies’ financial health in the next 6–12 months to be healthy or quite healthy. Meaning business is good, and growth is on the horizon. There will be plenty of work. But there won’t be enough people to do it. That optimism is overshadowed by the challenges of filling all those open positions. Over the next decade, we now expect to see about 2 million manufacturing jobs going unfilled nationally.

The impact of this workforce gap is real, and it is significant. In states like Wisconsin, where unemployment is extremely low (currently less than 3 percent), manufacturers will have to continue to focus on how to bring more skilled workers into the state from other areas. Which is a sizeable challenge of its own.
Here in Wisconsin, we’re already feeling the crunch of that competitive candidate market. A lot of it has to do with the age of the workforce. Experts have been sounding the alarm bell for years on the incredible rate of retirement among baby boomers. Now we’re right in the middle of it. The 65-and-older population is expected to increase by two-thirds between 2010 and 2025. We already mentioned Wisconsin’s all-time-low unemployment, which was at only 2.9 percent as of August, 2018. Compounding the issue, Wisconsin is falling behind in our ability to keep or attract college grads and out-of-state workers. Frankly, we’re losing our people. Since 2010, out-migration has outpaced natural births and out-of-state arrivals.

**So what can we do?**
What got you here (posting a job opening, then hiring one of the many applicants) won’t get you there (keeping pace with the growth projected by 99 percent of manufacturers in Northeast Wisconsin). Technology and social media make it even easier for employees to share and for job candidates to find information on employers. The way we recruit, attract, and retain employees has changed. In the same way as service, quality and price are simply the cost of doing business (not what differentiates you to your customers), salary, benefits and job security are the cost of employment (not what differentiates you to your employees).

Employees expect **their experience with an employer** to mirror **their experiences with favorite consumer brands.**

You see, the line between the employee experience and the customer experience is getting smaller and fuzzier. Employees are beginning to expect their experience with an employer to mirror the experiences they have with their favorite consumer brands. Those consumer brands work hard to set themselves apart from their competition, connect with their customers on a meaningful, emotional level, and give them a compelling reason to purchase (they offer a strong customer value proposition). In exactly the same way, employers need to work hard to set themselves apart from other employers, connect with candidates and employees on a meaningful, emotional level, and give job seekers and current staff a compelling reason to choose (or continue to choose) to work for them. That’s the most powerful way to attract and retain not just a workforce, but a workforce that can give you a competitive advantage.
An employer brand, simply put, is a company’s reputation as an employer and the value it offers to its employees. It’s how your own employees, candidates, and even the community around you perceive your company as a place to work. While branding has always been a crucial tool that marketers use to communicate and develop relationships with consumers, we are now seeing that branding is a crucial part of the talent attraction formula, too. Marketing is having a huge impact on recruiting, which is why now, more than ever, HR and marketing departments must be in lock-step when it comes to recruitment and retention communications.

**An employer brand is an investment, not an expense.**

It’s important to remember that you’re not just reaching out with a benevolent hand to offer employment. Anyone who comes to work for you is investing in you. They’re giving you their own most valuable resource—their time. Employment is a two-way street. If your employees are going to invest in your organization, you must invest in them in return. It’s the offer on which your entire employer brand is based.

And that doesn’t just mean investing by offering competitive pay or good benefits. It means taking the time to develop the kind of culture people want to be part of. Creating the opportunity for advancement today’s candidates and employees are looking for. Clearly standing for something your people can get behind and help you achieve. Developing that employer value proposition requires a time investment from every level of your organization, but when done properly, you’ll reap great benefits.

86% of HR professionals agree that recruitment is becoming more like marketing.
An employer brand communicates who you really are.

Your employer brand is an important part of creating a great experience for both employees and candidates. It’s how an organization communicates its identity to both potential and current employees. It encompasses your mission, values, culture and personality. A positive employer brand communicates that the organization is a good employer and a great place to work. It’s how you position yourself as an employer of choice. And if you don’t get intentional about what that employer brand is communicating (and make any necessary organizational changes to live up to it), everyone else will define it for you. Whether you like the outcome or not.

Employer brand affects recruitment of new employees, retention and engagement of current employees, and the overall perception of the organization in the market. And it doesn’t stop there, because your employees are the creators and keepers of your customer experience. Ultimately, how customers perceive you will be affected by your employee experience.

Employer Brand by the Numbers

- According to Gallup, **36% of job seekers** said a company’s employer brand is the most important consideration in a potential new job. That means your employer value proposition must be truly unique and compelling.

- According to Glassdoor, **69% of Americans** would not take a job with a company that had a bad reputation, even if they were unemployed.

- Also according to Glassdoor, **84% would consider leaving their current jobs** if offered another role with a company that had an excellent reputation. Most people would require less than a 10% salary increase to consider such a move.

- According to talentnow.com, when making a decision on where to apply for a job, **84% of job seekers** say the reputation of a company and employer is important.

- **9 out of 10 candidates** apply for a job when it’s from an employer brand that is actively maintained, according to workable.com.
What makes a good employer brand?
An effective employer brand lowers the cost to attract candidates, differentiates you from your competition, leads to retention, and trickles out to the customer experience. Successful employer brands are true, credible, relevant, distinctive, and aspirational. And they’re built on strong employer value propositions.

So what goes into a strong employer value proposition?

**An employer value proposition:**

- Goes beyond salary and traditional benefits
- Includes culture, which is a little more intangible
- Is more than a ping pong table or beer tap in the lounge
- Describes what an organization stands for, requires, and offers as an employer
- Is what motivates and engages employees

Towers Watson research shows that organizations who use their employer value proposition most effectively are **five times more likely to report that their employees are highly engaged.** They’re also **twice as likely to report achieving financial performance significantly above their peers** when compared to companies that use their employer value proposition less effectively.
Let’s take a closer look at several characteristics of an effective employer brand.

1. **It’s authentic.**

“Authentic” is a word that gets thrown around a lot in the marketing world. It’s unfortunate that it’s become such a buzzword. Because when we talk about authenticity, what we really mean is speaking the truth about who you are, what you stand for, and telling your own, unique story. When marketing is authentic, what someone hears about you should line up with their actual experience of you. In other words, don’t say one thing to get people in the door, then show them the real you once they’re in the door.

- Embrace who you are. Mine for insights into who your employees are and why they choose to work for you. Dig until you understand what values you’re built upon and how they intersect with the people you want to hire.

- Understand your own culture and your own vision of who you want to be as a company, then connect with the people who believe what you believe. Who are passionate about what you’re passionate about. Offer purpose and meaning and a future, because that’s what jobseekers are really looking for.

Doing the soul-searching to find that authentic story is powerful. Because that’s the stuff that really hits people where it counts.

Only 19% of the nearly 2,000 global employees surveyed feel strongly that the work experience their employer promotes publicly is matched by reality. In other words, what employees saw on a careers site, on the company’s social channels, or what they heard from recruiters was often inconsistent with what they experienced when they joined the company.

— A study by Weber Shandwick, in partnership with KRC Research
It gains the positive impact of employee referrals.

- Referrals decrease time to hire and cost of hire
  - Hiring a referred candidate is always faster than posting the job on boards, receiving candidates, screening them and taking them through your entire process.
  - On average, it takes 29 days to hire a referred candidate, 39 days for a candidate who comes through job boards and 55 days to hire a candidate who comes through a careers site.
  - Referred candidates cost 40% less compared to job boards.

- Referrals make better candidates
  - There is a strong correlation between the performance of your top employees and their referred candidates. A high performer will attract other high performers to the team.
  - The chances of a referred candidate getting fired decrease by an average of 350%.

- Referrals increase employee retention
  - Referred candidates are highly interested in joining your company. 46% of referred hires are retained for at least one year after they were hired. In comparison, the same number stands at 33% for careers sites and 22% for hires made via job boards.

- Referrals increase employee engagement
  - Employees have stakes in the company’s success, so if they are engaged and active in building out the team with top performers, they will feel more valued and appreciated.
  - Additionally, recognizing the actions of your employees, rewarding quality efforts, and creating friendly competition to achieve a team goal will also boost employee appreciation, which helps raise motivation.

It focuses on people.

Great employer brands are picky. They don't let just anyone join their team, but they make sure the recruit aligns with their values and culture (no matter how fancy or impressive their resume is or how badly they need to fill the position).
It’s intentional about culture.

Great employers truly know who they are, why they exist, and what they want to accomplish in the future. They’re able to effectively communicate this message to employees. And they mean it.

They use their core values to drive all internal branding decisions. The upside to this is protecting and prioritizing your culture. The downside is potentially turning down money (or clients) if they know that the opportunity goes against what they’re trying to build. It’s about consistency in both messaging and action. If you can’t follow through with who you say you are (employer brand promise), you’ll never earn complete buy-in from your employees.

To further protect their employer brand, organizations focused on maintaining a positive company culture make sure to onboard and educate new employees. They don’t just throw them into the mix hoping that they’ll “figure it out.”

It empowers employees to learn.

Great employer brands not only provide training and development, but they actually advocate for it.

On top of developing talent and providing resources for their employees to learn, great employer brands set the vision and get out of the way. They teach the principles, but don’t micromanage. They understand that it’s important not only for their current internal brand but also for the future of their company to teach employees how to think and dynamically problem solve, which will never happen if they’re constantly spoon-fed information.

How Manufacturers Can Develop an Employer Branding Strategy

Competition for talent is high, and it’s not letting up any time soon. According to manufacturing.net, if current trends continue, by the year 2025, there might be as many as 3.5 million new jobs available in manufacturing — but we might still be short on qualified workers by 2 million or more. What can manufacturers do?

The first step, as in so many situations, is recognizing the issue. Realizing not just that there’s a problem, but that there are steps you can take now to address it. Then understand the critical role a strong employer brand and effective communication can play in meeting the recruitment and retention challenge.

In the next chapter, we’ll go in-depth on how to build your employer brand, step by step.
Chapter 2: How to Create a Compelling Employer Brand

Putting the pieces in place
The easiest way to approach an employer brand is to think of it in similar terms as a customer-facing brand, only instead of selling someone your products, you’re selling them a reason to commit their future to your company. Like any branding, it’s all about getting into your customer’s (employee’s) head and seeing the world through their eyes. Speak to potential employees about the things they care about, not the things you care about, and help them visualize themselves working for you.

Another benefit of thinking of your employer brand in similar terms as your customer-facing brand is that it helps the two feel homogenous. If to customers you promise one thing and to employees you promise another, that dissonance will undermine both and make your company’s overall public presence that much weaker. Therefore, step one will always be to make sure your customer-facing brand is well defined, consistent and working in the marketplace to build a platform for your employer brand to stand on. For the purposes of this book, we’ll assume this is in place.
A three-step process
Here at Imaginasium, we use a well-defined three-step process for both customer and employer branding. In this chapter, we’ll reveal and unpack that process for you, so you can begin to think about your employer brand in a new way—maybe even do the work to develop the employer brand you’re aspiring to.

At a high level, this process follows the tried-and-true three steps of diagnosing the problem, defining a solution, then implementing that solution. We’ll look at the phases briefly now, then go into what is included in each in detail.

Uncover
Like any complicated project, the first step is always to take a look at everything we have to work with and audit the current state of things. We call this phase of the process Uncover. It will include collecting any materials we might use for recruiting, trade-show graphics, job postings, web pages, social media platforms, etc., as well as conducting new research into employee perceptions and engagement levels.

Define
Once we know what we have to work with, we begin to define where we want to go. In the Define Phase we start at a very high level of figuring out what our company offers that either is unique or, if common, that we think we do well and employees appreciate. That last bit is key. We need to work from the employee’s perspective through all of this. And, hint, pay and benefits are the table stakes, they’re not going to tip the scale. At minimum, you have to pay competitively and offer the benefits employees in your field expect. But for a strong employer brand, you’ll need to offer employees more than that.

Align
Rubber, meet road. This is when all of these weeks (sometimes months) of work begin to manifest themselves in the real world. The Align Phase often starts with a well-defined roll-out plan for how to introduce these pieces both publicly and internally. Again, don’t skip that last part. Making sure that current employees are on board will be crucial. Some of your messaging may be aspirational and they may scratch their head at hearing you tout things they aren’t (yet) experiencing.

And, like any project, iteration will be important. Don’t be afraid to evolve your messaging as you receive feedback from the marketplace on how effective it is.

Let’s get into the nitty gritty.
As mentioned, we can’t figure out how to get where we want to go without first figuring out where we are. The **Uncover Phase** is all about gathering data. We never want to make recommendations based solely on “gut” and assumptions.

There will be five main sub-phases within **Uncover**:

1. Data Collection (review current recruitment materials, internal communications, etc.)
2. Employee Engagement Surveys
3. Competitive Research
4. Discovery Session
5. Key Findings Report

**Data Collection**

Start by collecting everything you currently produce that might impact your employer brand. This will include physical samples as well as digital samples. Then audit your messaging throughout. What themes are presenting themselves? Are there repeated phrases or headlines you use? What single message would a job seeker in today’s market come away with?
Your employer brand is spread across a slew of materials. Some you may not normally consider employer branding, but they’re important nonetheless. The types of material you should collect could include:

- **Careers Page** of your website. Probably the single most important way of communicating your employer brand.

- **Sample Job Postings.** Read the copy. Does it offer a resounding “why” for working here?

- **Employer Event Graphics.** Trade show booths, brochures, videos, anything you might hand out at a show to recruit employees.

- **Employee Handbook.** This is part of that internal alignment step. How do you speak to and treat your current employees? Is there a gap between what you say to someone once they’ve started and what you tell them in the recruitment process?
Employee Engagement Surveys

The next crucial element is to get a strong handle on how engaged your current employees are and what they are saying about working for you. We know that your employees are hands down your strongest source of referrals. Therefore, knowing what they think about working for you will be a fundamental step in defining a new employer brand.

This can be as complicated or as simple as it needs to be, from hiring an outside consultant to gather and analyze statistically significant data, to using simple Google survey forms and collecting it internally. We have done both successfully.
Especially if you’re doing this yourself, the survey should be short and easy to complete. Any type of incentive you can offer to get a more complete picture would help, too. And make sure you pick a solution that will be accessible to both wired and non-wired employees. Allow time during working hours to complete the survey and give a short and firm deadline for when it should be completed.

Often, sliding-scale questions give us better responses than open-ended questions and allow us to quantify the results. Some of the questions you may find useful to ask could include:

1. How would you rate your overall experience as a Company employee? Please select the numbered response that best represents your feelings. (1-10)

2. From what you know by talking with other employees, how do you think your co-workers would rate their overall experience as a Company employee? Please select the numbered response that best represents your feelings. (1-10)

3. In some organizations, employees can see their role as a job where they need to put in their standard time and take home a paycheck. In other organizations, employees feel that they are part of something more than their job or role and are invested in the company’s overall vision, mission and values. Where would you fall between these two points? Please select the numbered response that best represents your feelings. (1-10)

![A spider chart from a recent employee engagement survey.](chart.png)
Knowing what employees think about working for you will be a fundamental step in defining a new employer brand.

4. The following questions are rated on a scale of Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree and can then be graphed in a spider chart to show the health of the overall organization:

   a. I feel highly valued as a person beyond the work that I do.
   b. I am proud to tell others that I work at Company.
   c. My supervisor takes time to meet with me regularly to set goals and assess my progress towards meeting my goals.
   d. I feel that my individual work contributes significantly to the overall goals of Company as an organization.
   e. Etc.

With a clear picture of how your employees currently feel, you will have better insight into what you should tell others who might want to work with you. And you have something to test against what your competitors are doing.

**Competitive Research**

We’ve already covered how competitive it is finding good talent, so it shouldn’t come as a surprise that you’ll need to consider who your employee competitors are, just as you need to look at your customer competitors.

For competitive research, you’ll need to consider things like geography and skill sets, as well as brand appeal. Who out there is trying to hire the same types of people as you (CNC machinists, engineers, welders, sales people, etc.), where are they located relative to your locations and, frankly, how “sexy” is it to work for them versus to work for you? Defining that appeal is the whole point of this process. All things being equal (pay, benefits, location, type of work), do you have a message and a reason for them to come to you rather than those other companies?
For this step of the process, list your top three to five competitors. Audit their websites. Don’t just look at the careers pages, although do start there. Look at their customer-facing pages, too. How do they present themselves? A family-oriented company? A visionary company doing exciting work? A company that values growth and ongoing training and will invest in their employees? Why does the company even exist at all? How are they impacting the world or their communities? Do they look “cool?” Do they look “safe?” Do they look like a company you could be “proud” to work at?

Capture their essence in a single headline along with some brand elements and put them on individual boards side by side. Look for ways that they’re similar and then, in there, you’ll see where you have opportunity to be different and stand out.
Discovery Session
This will often be the single most important element of uncovering your employer brand. A discovery session is a 3–4-hour (sometimes longer, rarely shorter) meeting that will pull together representatives from across the organization. The purpose is to begin discussing where your employer brand is currently and where it should go from here.

Frankly, this is a difficult session to run internally. Without an outsider’s perspective, it’s easy to get sucked into minutiae and lose sight of the bigger picture. That said, if you do decide to tackle this internally, here are some tricks to help it run smoothly:

✔ Have an empowered moderator. This person will guide the conversation, plan the agenda, and determine the amount of time spent on each section. This person will also have the authority—nay, the mandate—to shut down any individuals who might be trying to dominate the conversation, including the CEO! (Again, why an outside consultant can often manage this better.) However, the moderator should not “lead” the conversation. They can help it stay on track, but they shouldn’t force it into some preconceived notions.

✔ Have a clear agenda (but don’t share it with members). Know what you hope to get from the meeting. Often, this will start by identifying what challenges are going on both in the marketplace in general and within your organization. Move from status and challenges into identifying and agreeing on goals and what success looks like, then begin identifying specific strengths and messaging.

✔ Have breaks often. Don’t allow phones. Someone checking their messages in the middle of the session sends signals to everyone else that this isn’t important. Have breaks often and remind people that they can conduct their business at those times.

✔ Have snacks. Keeping participants’ energy up is key to keeping them engaged.
The Discovery Session is often the single most important element of uncovering your employer brand.

Who is in the Discovery Session? That depends on your goals. Obviously, those who have the most insight into how to recruit and persuade people will want to be there. That often includes Human Resources and Marketing. We often ask for a couple of “front-line” employees who are doing the work and maybe have a pulse on what the company’s current employer brand looks like. From there, you may include one or two leadership members who have a strong grasp on the company’s vision for where they want to go and what kind of talent they’ll need to get there.

All told, we like to keep the total number of participants to 6–10. More than that, and it’ll be hard to manage all of the feedback. Less, you may not get a full picture.

**Key Findings Report**

Finally, with all of the information collected, compile a single deliverable that you can share internally that summarizes everything you’ve discovered. There will be sections in the report for each of the buckets you just filled.

This document is only as valuable as the insights you put into it. Therefore, it should not simply be all of your notes compiled. Take the results of your Employee Engagement Surveys, for example, and put them into charts and graphics that simplify the findings. Summarize your notes from the Discovery Session into bullets, then write an executive summary highlighting what you think are the most important pieces of information that will guide the next phase: **Define.**
Finally! That’s often the feeling we have when we get to this phase. You’ll have been chomping at the bit to start solving throughout the entire Uncover Phase. Well, guess what. Now you get to.

Define will begin to put into words everything you’ve been “feeling” up until now. Again, there’s a specific process we use at Imaginasium for this and it breaks down into these main elements:

1. Define all of your Key Strengths.
2. Decide on the five strongest strengths. Those become your Unique Selling Propositions (USPs).
3. Define the emotion an employee/candidate will feel related to each of those USPs. These are called the Unique Buying Propositions (UBPs).
4. Put it all together into a Positioning Statement for your employer brand.
5. Begin defining Personality and Voice—the actual words and feelings your employees and candidates should hear and feel when considering working with you.
Key Strengths

With the information you’ve gathered, pull your team together and begin brainstorming all of the key strengths you feel your company can offer and stand behind. These don’t have to be unique, just so long as they are authentic.

For example, if we were to do an employer brand for a large manufacturing employer in Northeast Wisconsin, let’s call them Heavy Duty Equipment Corp. (or HDEC; apologies to any actual company named Heavy Duty Equipment Corp.), we might list things like:

- Hardworking (Midwest work ethic)
- Patriotic
- Proven
- Durable
- Strong market value, investing
- Approachable, real
- Saving lives
- Supporting heroes
- People-first culture
- Perseverance
- Grit
- Innovative spirit
- Ethical—clear definition of what ethical means, do the right thing
- Caring leadership
- Making a difference in people’s lives
- Longevity/history
- Family of brands
- Resilient
- Problem-solver
- AND MANY MORE!

Do you see what we’re doing? We’ll throw out all of the possible things people might think of when they think of Heavy Duty Equipment Corp. We try to stay away from emotions and focus on facts at this stage. It’s not uncommon to come out of this brainstorm with 40 or more Key Strengths.
Unique Selling Propositions (USPs)

Nobody will listen to or care about 40 reasons they should work for your company, though. And not all of those reasons are of equal importance. That's why we then whittle down the list to the top five most powerful key strengths you offer.

Have your team take a minute to vote and select their own top five, then somehow designate what they are. Obviously, the ones with the most votes would seem to have the most resonance, but it doesn't always mean those are the right five. Have discussion around what you mean by a certain phrase or why you feel this Key Strength supersedes another Key Strength. Check your Key Strengths against the competition. Do they differentiate you? If not, is there another Key Strength that maybe didn’t get as many votes, but would differentiate you? Consider replacing.

In the end, these become your USPs. They are the top five rational reasons someone should come work for you and dedicate their career to you. But we know nobody purchases based on reason and rational choice. They purchase (read: apply for work) based on emotion.
Unique Buying Propositions (UBPs)

That’s why the next step in our process is to take your five USPs and, for each one, begin listing any emotions you think a person should feel when they first learn of that strength. What one or two words will best describe the feeling they’ll get from that strength? For example, if one of the USPs we picked for HDEC were “a people-first culture,” we might list possible emotions as:

A **people-first culture** makes me feel:

- Supported
- Encouraged
- Optimistic
- Hopeful
- Valued
- Cared for/about
- Understood
- Fulfilled
- Empowered

Oftentimes, what will happen is you’ll end up with a number of synonyms for the same emotion. That’s okay, because the next step is to select the single strongest emotion out of that list. Every phrase will have nuances of meaning. Shades that color it this way or that. Discuss those nuances and come to consensus on the single strongest one. Don’t worry, you can keep the other words in that list. It’s wise to, because they’ll come in handy when you begin writing messaging. But for now, as an organization, we need to agree that this emotion is strategically aligned with how we want to be perceived in the employer marketplace.

For our example above, in case you were wondering, we would select “cared for/about” as what we want job candidates to feel it’ll be like to work at HDEC. Remember, this is only one UBP. You’ll do this for each of your USPs.
Positioning Statement

A positioning statement is a structured sentence that explains who your company is and who you’re talking to, what sets you apart and why someone should care. It’s a single sentence stating exactly what your position in the employer marketplace will be.

Often, it can feel clumsy and hard to fit into one sentence. That last part is intentional. If the sentence gets to be too long, a string of clauses linked together by commas and semicolons, you’ll know you’re not making the tough choices you need to make. A position is as much about what you aren’t as what you are. You’ve done a lot of work up to this point. Make that work worth it by being bold and strategic.

There are plenty of templates you can use to create a positioning statement. We use the following format:

To (audience) ...

Company Name is (fact) ...

That (point of difference) ...

Because (reason why) ...

A position is as much about what you aren’t as what you are. Make your work worth it by being bold and strategic.
Let’s go ahead and keep using our make-believe client Heavy Duty Equipment Corp. as an example. With the key strengths, USPs and UBPs all defined, we might write a positioning statement for them like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TO</th>
<th>current and potential employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Duty</td>
<td>a market-leading manufacturer of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment Corp</td>
<td>severe-duty vehicles and equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>invests in our people and in innovation that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>revolutionizes the way people work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAT</td>
<td>every day people doing some of the toughest work on the planet put their faith in us—they don’t quit, and we won’t quit on them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first two fields are pretty straightforward. Facts. The differentiator field—the “that” field—can often be where positioning statements begin to fall apart. Too many times we see companies trying to force every USP or key strength they can into that block. Again, make the tough choices. Narrow in on the single one or two strengths that will help candidates understand what sets you apart.

Finally, the last field should be emotional. It needs to summarize WHY I would want to work there. What it’ll feel like to go into work every day for a company like yours. No, not everyone will produce a product with as clear an impact in people’s lives as the next company, but every organization exists for reasons bigger than simply “to make money.” Find that reason. Plant a flag there and then let everyone see it flying proud.
Personality and Voice
We’re nearing the end. We’ve outlined everything we think there is that sets you apart. We’ve narrowed that list down to the top five powerful strengths called your USPs. We’ve assigned targeted emotions to each of those and called those your UBP. We’ve condensed everything into a strategic position that you will hold in the employer marketplace. And now we get to put words to all of that.

Just as your customer-facing brand has a personality and a voice to how it speaks, so too should your employee-facing brand. They won’t be exactly the same, though they should influence each other.

There are a number of ways to define your employer personality, but start by thinking of your company as a literal person. What do they look like? What choices do they make in how they present themselves to the world? Are they polite and formal? Casual and edgy? Do they like to laugh or are they all business? When they speak, do they use slang and simple language or do they use jargon-heavy, technical language?

Just as your customer-facing brand has a personality and a voice to how it speaks, so too should your employee-facing brand.
Think about it from an employee’s perspective and choose phrases that will help them understand what working for you means. You might describe your culture as “fast-thinking, fast-working, fast-playing and fast-learning” or you might describe it as a company of “strategic and deep-thinking problem solvers.”

Voice presents itself in every word choice, every phrase, the length of your sentences and grammar. A lot can be determined about a company based on how they phrase a job posting. Does it sound like someone with a law degree wrote it? Process and formal structure are probably important to that organization. Does it sound snappy or edgy (even using colorful language)? Then maybe it’ll be the kind of place where titles are less important than ideas and results.

This isn’t just for fun, either. Nobody wants to apply to or be hired into a position they’re not a good fit for. It costs the company time and money to train then fire someone who isn’t a good fit. And it costs the employee lost opportunities at other positions and self-confidence if they are thrust into a situation they can’t succeed in. Voice matters. It helps pre-screen applicants.

By the end of the Define Phase, you will have a clear picture of what kind of company you want to be in the marketplace. You’ll have written down your differentiators and why they matter. You’ll know how you want to speak and present yourself to employees and candidates.

At this point, we recommend compiling all of the work you’ve done to date into an Employer Brand Language Manual. By having this documented, you can share it with any team members who might touch elements in the next phase—the Align Phase.
It’s been a lot of work, but you are now ready to roll this puppy out. This phase is harder to pin down, because it will vary for every company. Depending on resources (both time and money), as well as need, you’ll want to consider how all of the thinking and planning you’ve just gone through makes its way into actual materials out in the marketplace.

It helps to break this into two primary considerations.

1. **INTERNAL**— How will the new employer brand be presented to current employees?

2. **EXTERNAL**— How will the new employer brand be presented to career candidates?

**Internal**

You need to first make sure everyone inside your own walls is on board and can stand behind what you want to put out in the public. If you try to position yourselves one way, but then all of your employees are secretly out there calling bunk on your claims, you will have a serious problem. Plus, as you fill positions with candidates who bought into one message, once they’re on the job they’ll be surrounded by people who feel completely opposite about your brand. No bueno.
You need to first make sure everyone inside your own walls is on board and can stand behind what you put out in the public.

Start by defining an internal roll-out plan. List any and all tactics you can think of for how this new employer brand should come to life inside your company. Some questions you might ask yourself could be:

• Will this be a “splash” event roll-out or will it be slow and quiet?

• If you have multiple locations and shifts, how will you make sure everyone has an equal chance to hear the message?

• If any elements of the new employer brand are aspirational, what action items do we have to define to get there? How do we make our dream a reality?

• What tools or processes do we already have available to roll this out?
  • Regular meetings
  • Reporting structure
  • Intranet
  • Etc.
  • Message boards

• Are there environmental changes (signage or other communication inside your physical space) we could make to help this internal brand feel real and keep it front and center in people’s daily work?

• Are there new programs or competitions we could create to gamify or incentivize our employer brand?

• How can we better use technology to get our message out internally?

• How can we make sure we have equal plans for wired and non-wired employees?
External
Everyone on board? Good, now we can (finally) get things rolling out in the marketplace. After all, this is why you even started this process. You need more and better candidates applying to your job openings. If your company is going to get to that next level, you need the right talent in place. Thus, a revised, powerful employer brand.

Remember how we said that your customer-facing brand influences your employer brand? Here’s where you’re going to really depend on that. Without a doubt, your strongest recruiting tool will be your website. It’s the place everyone will go to when they’re thinking about applying for work with you. It’s where they’ll go to check out if you’re even a company worthy of their talents. They’ll judge you on what you say it’s like to work with you (careers, about, social responsibility pages, etc.) and they’ll judge you on what you tell your customers it’s like to work with you (everything else). Make sure both of them are singing in harmony.

Candidates will judge you on what you say it’s like to work with you and on what you tell customers it’s like to work with you. Make sure both are singing in harmony.

Again, we recommend drafting a plan for how you will roll out your brand externally. Then prioritize based on impact, cost and time to implement. Few companies can afford to redo everything at once. Updating your website to reflect the new brand will almost always be the most important and first step. However, you may be in an industry that depends heavily on recruiting at schools and trade shows. If that’s the case, graphics, booth designs and handouts might be more important, or a close second.
As you're creating your roll-out strategy and materials, look for any opportunities to template or reuse messaging. Job postings will often have some boilerplate elements. Write those in the new voice and make them available to all departments that might need them.

Begin finding ways of putting your UBPs into your messaging everywhere you can. These are the five most powerful emotional reasons someone has to work for you. Write headlines and copy around those and remember to always focus on what’s in it for the employee, not what’s in it for you. Go beyond things like pay and benefits and help them see how they can be fulfilled working for you—how you’ll help them find satisfaction and happiness in their career.

Where we work is easily one of the most important decisions we ever make. We’ll spend more time at our jobs than we will with our own families. You need to earn employees’ dedication. Show them a vision of a place where they can do meaningful work and be rewarded for it more than they will at “the other guys’” shop.

Do those things consistently, powerfully and fairly and you’ll have an employer brand that’ll be the envy of your competitors.
Imaginasium is a Green Bay-based marketing and communications firm that works with manufacturers to clarify their message, build a culture that believes and supports the company’s vision, and create marketing that drives customers to action. We do that by creating understanding of who you are and what you stand for inside your own walls. Then, guided by our unique Customer Experience Ecosystem framework, we help align that story with internal actions and external communications, to help our clients build a complete and consistent customer experience—the kind that drives business growth and profitability, and generates loyalty with your customers.